

Getting Serious About Youth Voice: Helping Youth Speak Out

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How service providers in rural communities benefit from supporting youth leadership

Audience survey

Youth/Young Adults:

- How do you believe young peoples' input could change how services are provided in your community?

Adult/professionals:

- How do you believe youth leadership involvement could benefit your agency or organization?

Here's what research* says about the benefits of youth leadership involvement...

For organizations:

- Bring clarity to their mission
- Improve adult staff involvement
- Strengthen their commitment to the work
- Better meet needs of youth people when they understand youth
- Enhance the commitment and energy of adults
- Embed youth involvement principles in the organization practices
- Generate increased creativity
- Bring underrepresented groups in the organizational decision making

*Matarrese, M., McGinnis L., Mora M. (2005) Technical Assistance Partnership: Youth Involvement in Systems of Care

Here's what research* says about the benefits of youth leadership involvement...

For Planners/Policy Makers:

- Better understanding of the needs and issues of the youth population they serve
- Gain a different perspective of youth experiences with multisystem involvement
- Develop systems that are more creative and better meet the needs of children and families
- Know what works and does not work based on real-world youth experience

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What Northern Arizona says about the benefits of youth leadership involvement...

From the organizations:

- Creates a new resource for organizations who want to broaden their knowledge/resource base
- "gets us on the same page"
- "more connections"
- Offers a youth perspective to resources or services an organization refers to or provides
- Helps build a more sustainable workforce by reducing burn-out
- "We as providers can see the youth as people trying to navigate their way in a tough world, rather than just being a "difficult population to work with."
- Improves engagement or trust with youth they work with
- Helps to reduce "agency stigma"

What Northern Arizona says about the benefits of youth leadership involvement...

For Planners/Policy Maker:

- Shows us where good intentions fell short of effective outcomes
- Assisting program developers design programs for youth that are desirable and suitable
- Helps to identify gaps or shortcomings in policy that were written from an urban perspective.

Youth Leadership in Action

- Youth partnership in program design
- Youth trainers for service providers and community stakeholders
- Youth groups as a community resource
- Youth membership in councils and committees

Importance of youth voice development:

- Value in discovering needs, culture, strengths, preferences, natural supports and support service preferences from a youth's perspective
- More person-centered service planning
- Demonstrates to youth the value others place in better understanding their perspective, leading to greater investment by youth, an increase in self-efficacy and empowerment and ultimately greater positive outcomes for youth.

Strategies for Developing Youth Voice in CFTs and ACTs:
Youth Voice Development in 3 Phases

- Because the process involved in developing effective youth voice is not short, it is important to begin early. With the goal of youth being able to effectively self advocate as they approach adulthood it's important that this effort begin once developmentally appropriate.
- While exercised and demonstrated during CFT/ACTs, much of the work associated with developing effective youth voice is done outside of team meetings through partnership with natural or formal support providers. Greater attention must be paid to who occupies this support role when a youth is in an out of home placement outside the area from which an RA case manager or family member is based. In these circumstances someone within the immediate proximity of the youth should be coached as to the purpose, goal and strategies of youth voice development.
- Though this process is described in three phases, these are not rigid sequential steps but rather overlapping phases that, in many circumstances, may all be occurring simultaneously to varying degrees.

Phase 1:
Youth Advocate

- The primary function of this is preliminary phase is to help ensure immediate needs are being heard and met by the team members. Through discovering what the youth's identified needs are and how they prefer for them to be met youth are able see how their voice affects the team process. Reliant upon engagement and trust established with the youth during this phase, this phase can be useful in demonstrating the relationship building that is necessary amongst team members. Early on in this phase is when the youth can begin being coached as to how they can effectively advocate for themselves. This can be done through one on one coaching, modeling, debriefing after team meetings or role playing. Some possible skills related to this phase are:
- Communication strategies
 - Speaking to groups
 - Advanced preparation of questions or statements
 - How to ask clarifying questions
 - Confidence building
- Identifying and inviting desired team members
- Preparing for a team meetings
 - Drafting portions of the agenda
 - Preparing questions
 - Follow-up steps

Phase 2:
Co-facilitation

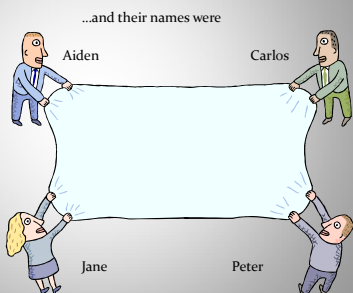
- While still performing much of the same role as in the first phase, the youth can concurrently begin preparing to assume increasingly more functions of this role throughout this phase. Youth can begin moving more deeply into a facilitation role at the pace that is appropriate and comfortable for them while always having the immediate assistance of their adult support or RA facilitator.
- Some new functions of the youth role might include:
 - Scheduling or rescheduling their own team meetings
 - Drafting the majority of the team meeting agenda
 - Determining team membership
- The function of the staff facilitator remains unchanged, though allowing the youth to co-facilitate team meetings to the degree at which they feel comfortable. Ongoing skill building is important as the youth's facilitator role increases. It is at the latter part of this phase when other team members may be unfamiliar with or have reservations about a youth co-facilitated team. This could have challenging effects upon the team's function and may require some intervention by the staff facilitator.

Phase 3: Supporting the Youth

- While a youth begins to actualize their ability to self-advocate it is important for the staff facilitator to continuously reinforce the benefits of this empowerment, not just to the youth but also to the adult team members. This can be made difficult if the youth's efforts are regularly met with resistance or disingenuously by other team members. The staff facilitator can ameliorate this effect by:
 - Encouraging and emotionally supporting the youth
 - Helping reinforce or reframing the youth's message
 - Modeling for other adults how to effectively interpret youth voice
 - Meet with other stakeholders outside of the team meeting to hear any possible concerns or assist them in understanding a youth's needs.

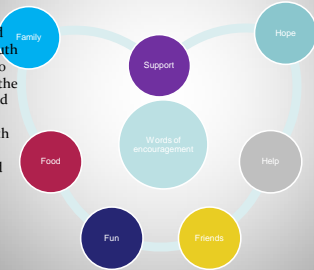
A youth Group at a Glance

One day four youth get together. They start talking and soon one comes up with the idea of starting a group where they can hang out, talk about their days, and help each with any problems they should face.



Words of Encouragement

Before they could start this said youth group they had to figure out, what the group itself would focus around. So they came up with some words that their group could identify with.



Carlos' needs

Carlos, was what people considered a problem child, the reason for this was thought to be because he had (ODD) oppositional defiant disorder, which was true.

Yet this is what everyone assumed that his acting out was all about; however this was because no one knew what was going on at home.

Of course Carlos did not want to tell anyone that his father was molesting him, because that would embarrass him, and his home would be taken away. So when Carlos heard about the youth group idea, he was not very interested, because what could a bunch of kids do that several adults could not.

Peter's needs

Where some of what most kids his age needed love, acceptance and support; the biggest challenge for Peter was that his mother had a mental illness and she had been put into a residential treatment center. Peter did not want anyone in his school to know of this however, so he never talked about and he kept it bottled up inside. So when the idea of the youth group was brought up he was not for it as that would mean if he said anything it might leave the group and something would be said in school about it.

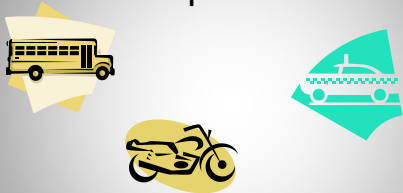
Jane's needs

Jane would always isolate herself from, people due to her mother having a mental illness, she was afraid what people would say if they got to know her then found out that her mother had a mental illness. This caused her grades to suffer as she felt all alone in the world. So when she heard of the idea about the youth group, she actually became somewhat excited as she might be able to make new friends.

Aiden's needs

Aiden was struggling with the fact that he had bipolar disorder, that was until he found out about NAMI; yet he soon became upset once he found out that NAMI had no support groups for the youth, so he decided to propose the idea to his three friends Peter, Carlos and Jane. However they were very skeptical about the idea, but they decided to go for it none the less.

Transportation



What the Group has done

- Walked in the NAMI walks one year
- Hosted a leadership training
- Helped in getting shirts for the Faces of hope concert

These are just a few of the things that the youth group did to help the community and the youth within it.

Yet the most important things actually to place within the youth group itself, and between its members.

Achievements

Peter managed to find a place in which he could safely share what he was going through about his mother being mentally ill, and just recently took the initiative to move into a friends so he can focus on his education, with less distraction and drama then what was in his house.

Carlos, never really told anyone in the youth group about the molestation, however when he attempted suicide he gave Aiden a call, And he is now in a residential facility where he can work through his challenges.

Jane, found out that you could have friends even if your mother has a mental illness. She also doing a lot better in school.
